Habitat II

United Nations Conference
on Human Settlements
Istanbul, Turkey 3-14 June 1996

The City Summit

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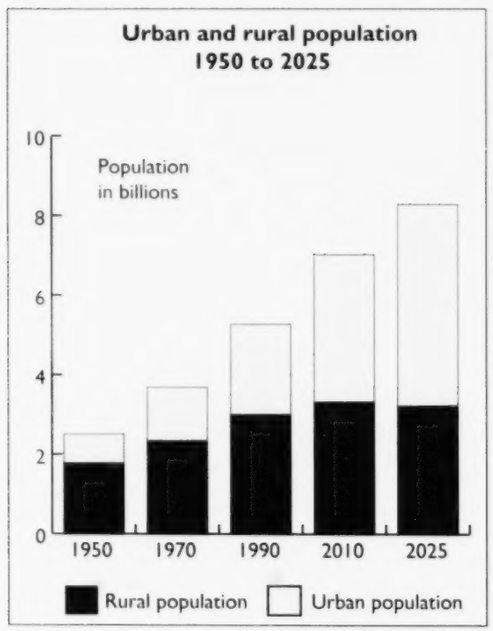
Why a Conference on Cities ?

Today almost one half of the world's population live in cities; projections for the year 2025 show that more than two thirds of us will be city dwellers. The world's cities are growing by one million people each week. Cities today play a significant role in development. They continue to attract migrants from rural areas because they enable people to advance socially and economically. Cities offer



significant economies of scale in the provision of jobs, housing and services, and are important centres of productivity and social development.

However, the stress of this rapid urban population growth is often overwhelming. The long list of afflictions includes urban poverty rates of up to 60 per cent. Despite growing investments, more than one third of the urban population live in substandard housing. Forty per cent of urban dwellers do not have access to safe drinking water or adequate sanitation. Primarily due to rapid growth and a deteriorating urban environment, at least 600 million people in human settlements (cities, towns and villages) already live in health- and life-threatening situations, and almost 50 per cent of these are children.

These concerns transcend the borders of developed and developing countries. The high rate of urban population growth in most regions has led to common problems: congestion, lack of funds to provide basic services, a shortage of adequate housing and declining infrastructure, to name a few.

While these problems are occurring in urban areas, cities still have an important role to play in protecting the global environment in the face of rapid urban population growth. Agricultural and livestock production in rural areas are pushing farther and farther into ecologically fragile regions and cannot support a growing population. The finite land and water resources make it imperative that we carefully plan our human settlements. Indeed, sustainable urbanization will ease the pressures caused by encroachment on fragile natural habitats.

To address these mounting challenges, and to take advantage of the opportunities resulting from technological development, the United Nations Member States will convene the second UN Conference on Human Settlements. This Conference, commonly known as Habitat II and called the "City Summit" by UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, will be held in Istanbul, Turkey, from 3 to 14 June 1996. The themes of the Conference are sustainable human settlements in an urbanizing world and adequate shelter for all.

The Habitat II Conference focuses on people and our relationship to our living environment. It is the culmination of a series of major UN conferences that have addressed topics such as the environment, population, social development and women.

Improving Governance and Participation

Inadequate leadership, corruption and mismanagement have a harmful effect on the physical, environmental, social and ethical structures of cities. Habitat II will encourage Governments and local authorities to embark on partnerships with urban dwellers to improve management of cities. In this way, Habitat II will help to create opportunities for citizens to participate in local decision-making processes, creating innovative solutions through partnerships.

Meeting Housing and Infrastructural Needs

Over one billion people around the world live in inadequate conditions — without piped water, electricity, security of land tenure, access to roads or health facilities. In many parts of the world, the means available for production and financing of housing and urban infrastructure are too limited to meet basic needs. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, the Nairobi-based agency and secretariat for Habitat II, advocates the recognition by Governments that they alone cannot provide for the needs of their populations. Instead, Governments need to play an enabling role through reforming policies, institutions and legal frameworks. They should facilitate involvement of all the stakeholders from household, community-based organizations through to the private sector and local government. This would enable housing markets to work more efficiently and to guarantee equally to women and men security of tenure, access to land, access to credit and protection from arbitrary eviction. This approach is at the heart of the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000, which was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1988.

"The City Summit encompasses many issues. There are hard questions to answer. How can we improve the governance and finance of human settlements? What policies are needed to improve conditions for the poorest people, families and communities? How can we ensure basic hygienic conditions in urban areas, while avoiding long-term damage to the environment? Can we ensure that, by a target date, adequate shelter will exist for all? What must be done to mitigate the effects of natural disaster and war? Can the cycle of deprivation, conflict, devastation and failure to develop be broken?"

Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Secretary-General of the United Nations

Improving the Urban Economy: Reducing Poverty and Creating Jobs

Urban poverty is rising at an alarming pace, especially among women. The informal economic sector — which makes a substantial contribution to the delivery of services, production of goods, building of infrastructure and housing construction — often provides the only opportunity for the urban poor to make a living. Local informal housing construction,

Increasing Awareness of Gender Issues
Women and men use and experience cities differently, according to their roles, responsibilities and access to resources. For example, when basic services are lacking in a settlement, more often than not it is women who take on responsibilities such as water collection and refuse disposal. Women often have unequal access to resources such as property, credit, training and technology. All of these factors must be addressed urgently, as they make it harder for women to improve their living standards and those of their children.

Disaster Mitigation, Relief and Reconstruction
As cities become larger and more densely populated, they become increasingly vulnerable to natural and man-made disasters such as earthquakes, floods, industrial hazards, epidemics, civil strife and wars. Poor people are forced to live in the most exposed, dangerous and cramped conditions, in flood-prone areas, on steep hillsides or near polluted streams and waste dumps. As a result, they are most likely to lose their homes or their lives when disasters occur. Better planning, access to affordable urban land, and improved construction methods can reduce the extent of catastrophes.

The Habitat Agenda
In the preparations for Habitat II, many different partners are drafting and debating the elements of the conference document, The Habitat Agenda, which will comprise a Statement of Principles and Commitments, and a Global Plan of Action to be adopted by the Conference. The document will address key issues facing the world's towns and cities during the next two decades, with special focus on remedial action in the next five years (1996-2000).

Participation
A unique feature of the Habitat II Conference is the strong encouragement from States for the active participation of local governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations and the academic and scientific communities. Member States agree that these partnerships are vital for more effective planning, resource mobilization and investment in all aspects of shelter and human settlements development, and for distributing the benefits of economic growth more equitably.

National Reports and Committees
As part of the preparations, reports are being prepared by Member States to reflect national experiences and perspectives on urbanization. In the vast majority of countries, Governments are inviting non-governmental representatives to join the national committees preparing these reports. The contact details of your national committee may be requested from the Habitat II secretariat.

Best Practices
A major initiative of the preparatory process is the identification of "best practices for improving the living environment". These successful and sustainable approaches to poverty eradication; managing the urban environment; providing access to land, shelter and finance; empowering women and men; and many other issues will be documented and disseminated widely. The Best Practices Initiative is designed to inspire action and to serve as a vehicle for the exchange of knowledge, experience and expertise.

UNCHS (Habitat)
The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS — Habitat) was established in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1978, two years after the Habitat I Conference. Habitat is responsible for the formulation and implementation of the human settlements programmes of the United Nations. Habitat serves as a think tank within the United Nations system, utilizing its research and technical analysis capacity to assist Governments in improving the development and management of human settlements. Habitat's operational activities combine technical advice, applied research, training and information.

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